

ORDINATION (1974)

Introduction

1. The Conference of 1972 referred the following matters to the Faith and Order Committee:

- (a) The Conference resolved that an investigation into the theology of ordination and in particular the relation of the ordained ministry in the sector to that of the laity be undertaken on behalf of the Church by the Faith and Order Committee, with power to consult (Conference 1972 *Representative Agenda* p. 466; *Daily Record* p. 45).
- (b) The Conference referred to the Faith and Order Committee for consideration and report the following resolution of Convocation (*Minutes* 1972 p. 39): The Wesley Deaconess Order meeting in Convocation, aware that the Ministry of Word and Sacraments may be open to women, requests the Methodist Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee to examine the meaning of both presbyteral and diaconal ministries.

2. The Conference of 1972 in its Ministerial Session had received a suggestion from the Sheffield Synod (M) requesting the Conference to re-examine the significance of Ordination and to give guidance to the Church in this matter. The Conference concurred with the recommendation of the Memorials Committee that this suggestion be referred to the Committee (sic) on the Church's Ministries in the Modern World, with the direction that the Committee should have in mind previous pronouncements of the Conference on this subject (Conference 1972 *Ministerial Agenda* p. 81; *Daily Record* p. 7). It was partly because of this that the Representative Session of the Conference subsequently gave to the Faith and Order Committee the power to consult referred to above. The Commission on the Church's Ministries by joint consent left the matter entirely to the Faith and Order Committee (Conference 1973 *Representative Agenda* p. 477), and in any case did not seek reappointment by the Conference of 1973, but it was represented at the discussions of these matters by its convener; the Ministerial Training Committee, the Committee on the Sectors, and the Wesley Deaconess Order, now all part of the Division of Ministries, were also represented.

The Methodist Position

3. Among previous pronouncements of the Conference on this subject we may include:

The Deed of Union.

The Ordination Service in the Book of Offices.

The Nature of the Christian Church according to the Teaching of the Methodists (Statement approved by the Conference of 1937) (cited as N).

Ordination in the Methodist Church (statement approved by the Conference of 1960): it is to be found in *Ministry, Baptism and Membership in the Methodist Church* (Methodist Publishing House, 1962, pp. 7-17 (cited as M).

Anglican-Methodist Unity, the Report of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission, (including Part I The Ordinal) 1968, which the Conference accepted by its vote in 1969.

There are also the various reports of the Commission on the Nature of the Church's Ministries in the Modern World. These are cited from *Patterns of Ministry in the Methodist Church* (Home Mission Department) (some of these were merely presented; others were actually approved by the Conference). (cited as C).

4. There is a large general literature on the subject, including numerous reports, such as that of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission 'Ordination in Ecumenical Perspective'. The Methodist documents listed above contain excellent material, and some of our difficulties arise because they are not sufficiently known and have not been sufficiently digested. They give, with the authority of the Conference, the official position of our Church, which is by no means as obscure as is often supposed. We attempt here to summarise them very briefly in their own words.

5. The main views which Methodism has held concerning the ministry and ordination are as follows:- All ministry in and by the Church derives from the ministry of Christ (C 2). As all Christians are priests in virtue of their access to God, so all Christians are ministers in virtue of their membership in the one body (N 22). Within the ministry of the Church there are various 'manifestations' of the Spirit 'for the building up of the Body of Christ' (M 8). There is evidence in the New Testament of the appointment by St Paul and others of boards of 'presbyters', who are also called 'bishops', to exercise leadership and pastoral care in the local Churches (M 8). The Methodist Church believes that its ministry is ordered in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. There is a single ordained ministry equivalent to that of the 'presbyter-bishops' in the New Testament (M 11). Methodist Ministers are both travelling preachers in the Methodist Connexion and Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the Church of God (M 12). They have authority to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, and they normally exercise pastoral care in one or more local congregations (M 12). 'In the office of a Minister are brought together the manifold functions of the Church's ministry, and it is his privilege to exercise them as the servant of Christ and of his fellows in the Church as a whole, as the Church under the guidance of the Spirit shall appoint him'. (M 16). 'The ordained Minister has full authority to administer the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Deaconesses, Probationers, Lay Pastors, Local Preachers and other laymen are entitled to administer this Sacrament only when especially authorized by a temporary Dispensation of the Conference; the ordained Minister is entitled by his ordination'. (M 16). 'The act of making a man a Minister is performed by the Methodist Conference, by its standing vote in the Reception into Full Connexion and through its appointed representatives in the Ordination Service; it is not performed by individuals, or a group of individuals, acting in their own capacity'. (M 15).

Another Statement?

6. We now turn to the question whether or not there is anything of substance to add to these Reports. Our answer is that we find in the emphasis of our time upon the whole people of God as the agent of Christ's continuing ministry in the world a sufficient reason for saying new things about ordination, or more probably saying old things in a different way. Ordination can be seen afresh in a situation where it is the entire *laos* (people) of God who share in the ministry of Christ, where clericalism is

discredited, and where the starting-point is not to define the difference between ordained ministers and the laity but to state what they have in common.

7. To do this is not to search for some lowest common denominator; it is rather to see the ordained Minister as, like all other Christians, enjoying the high privilege of sharing in Christ's ministry, being part of 'the royal priesthood which the whole Church has received from Christ her Lord, and in which each member of his Body shares', as the 1968 Ordinal puts it. The 'ordination' for this ministry is baptism and confirmation, its continuing renewal is in the eucharist and the other means of grace, and its essential function is 'being a Christ to our neighbour'. In exercising this ministry the whole people of God, ordained and lay, is being the Body of Christ among men. It is within this context that we look again at the meaning of ordination.

8. Two brief introductory points are necessary. It has been said that with ordination, as with much else in Methodism, we do not have a considered theology which we then put into practice; rather we find theological reasons for what we are already doing because what we are doing works well. But our view is that theology and practice must learn from each other.

9. Secondly, we wish to avoid the use of labels for particular views of ordination. The use of such terms as 'functional view', 'ontological view', 'temporary view', 'suspendable view', and so forth tends to keep the discussion in well-worn channels and makes more difficult any attempt to see ordination in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God. We must, however, concede that as we discuss the meaning of ordination, there will be some who understand it in terms of what a person is, others in terms of what he does. For some the meaning centres on the man (or woman)*, for others on his ministry. Again we hope that these may prove to be complementary, not divisive.

*The masculine includes the feminine throughout.

The Call of God

10. 'It is the universal conviction of the Methodist people that the office of the Christian ministry depends upon the call of God . . .'

So reads the Deed of Union, and we should not wish to dissent from it. Whatever spiritual, theological, and psychological factors are involved – and these will vary from person to person – there must be a sense of inward pressure and constraint. A person who is called is one who is in the end convinced that he has no choice but to offer himself for the ordained ministry.

11. Such a call in no way abrogates the call to be Christ in the world which comes to the whole people of God. This applies equally to ministers and laymen. A man is not called *out* of the Church to be a minister. What he receives is a special calling within a general calling. Such a special calling (to the ordained ministry) must be distinguished from other special callings (to many differing occupations) which are received within the general calling of the people of God.

12. It is the belief and practice of our Church – and we are glad that it is so – that the individual sense of call must be recognized and confirmed by the corporate judgment of the Church. This is done through the procedures of candidature, ministerial training, and probation; and finally in the ordination service in which the whole Church, ordained and lay, sets its seal on the call to the ordained ministry.

Ordained to what?

13. In what does this special calling consist? Unquestionably there are functions to fulfil, associated by long tradition with the ordained ministry and written into the ordination service. There are the preaching of the gospel, the celebration of the sacraments, pastoral care, the teaching office (this includes the theological task), and the leadership of the churches. But it would be inadequate to confine the special calling to a collection of functions. For one thing, they are largely shared with people who are not ordained – the local preacher, the class leader and the society steward witness to that. For another, some ordained ministers are not in a position to carry out all the functions, but their ordination is not questioned on that account.

14. To find a further category we go back to the rediscovery of the significance of the whole people of God. They are what they are because of the general calling to which we have referred. They are called, all of them, ordained and unordained, to be the Body of Christ to men. But as a perpetual reminder of this calling and as a means of being obedient to it the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focussed and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through the Church to the world.

15. We hold that for a Minister to be this and to do this requires a total commitment of the entire person. This view does not prejudice the question whether or not an ordained Minister can be part-time in the service of the Church or earn his living wholly in secular employment. Nor does it set a limit to new experimental ministries very different from the traditional pattern. But as commitment of the entire person is unqualified commitment, it does call into serious question temporary or restricted views of ordination, and it demands of the ordained Minister a discipline proper to his office.

16. Furthermore, we see in such a view of the ministry a sufficient reason why it should normally be ordained Ministers who preside at the eucharist. The eucharist, which sacramentally expresses the whole gospel, is the representative act of the whole Church, and it is fitting that the representative person should preside.

Discipline and Jurisdiction

17. All Christian Ministers are under some kind of discipline. In Churches which retain the historic episcopate presbyters, at least theoretically, are connected with some particular bishop, and in modern Free Churches lists of Ministers are kept in various ways. Moreover a man cannot be ordained simply in order to have the status of a presbyter (or a bishop) without exercising it in some regular way: he must be ordained to some particular charge, parish, college, or other sector. He thus acquires 'jurisdiction' in a particular sphere.

18. All that we have said implies the permanence of ordination. Especially is this true of the total commitment expressed in the vows, and still more the activity of God the Holy Spirit in commissioning and authorizing. The same theology holds good for the whole people of God, for baptism is permanent in the same sense. The word 'indelibility' is sometimes used in this connection, but as it implies an outdated philosophy it is perhaps best avoided; Methodism has never made any official use of it. But the important idea of permanence is expressed in the general practice of the Church, which does not re-baptize or re-ordain.

19. But all churches must have some procedure for depriving a person of the exercise of his ministry if he ceases to hold the faith or shows himself morally unfit to exercise it. How is this to be reconciled with the element of permanence? The accepted answer is that such a person is deprived of the *exercise* of his orders, though in some traditions he is permitted to exercise them in grave emergencies, e.g. to minister sacramentally to a dying man. Fortunately such deprivation, popularly known as ‘unfrocking’, is exceedingly rare. It would, however, be absurd to deny the possibility, which in no way implies that ordination is to a temporary status. Unfortunately there have been a few ‘wandering bishops’, who have purported to exercise a ministry out of contact with any organized Church or at least with the Church in which they were consecrated; and this shows the danger of a doctrine of the ministry exempt from disciplinary control. Ministry must always be exercised within the Church, not apart from it or over it. Ministerial status cannot rightly be used in a vacuum. This does not preclude an ordained Minister from passing out of the discipline of one denomination into that of another without re-ordination.

20. In many churches the case is quite different when a Minister wishes to give up one appointment and not take up another. Though a voluntary abandonment of holy orders or ministerial status is possible, it is not necessary. An Anglican priest may retain his orders, though if he wishes to officiate on occasions, he needs to be licensed by a bishop; and in some other Churches a Minister needs to render some form of service he is to remain on the list of Ministers or be a member of the presbytery.

Full Connexion

21. Methodism has held to the principle of discipline in a very strong form. ‘The Methodism Church recognizes a man’s divine call to the ministry, and he himself becomes a Minister, by a process in which Reception into Full Connexion and the Ordination Service are integral parts of the whole’ (Conference 1960, inaccurately printed in M 15). The reason lies in our historic origin in a number of united societies among whom worked Travelling Preachers in connexion with Mr Wesley. Subsequently the whole body came to be known as a Connexion, with something of the ethos of a religious order. But now the Connexion has developed into a Church and we act as such; yet our society and connexional origin may serve to remind us of certain truths which we neglect at our peril and which we might hope to contribute to the united Church of the future. How then does Reception into Full Connexion relate to the ecclesiastical act of Ordination? Methodist Travelling Preachers were received into Full Connexion over a long period of years before there was any idea of their being ordained. Then there was a period when Reception into Full Connexion was regarded as virtual ordination. Now, however, the ceremonies are distinct, but they are so closely associated that neither is complete without the other. The fact that the Reception is an act of the Representative Session of the Conference associates the whole Church with the making of a Minister, and it is more than a mere prelude to the Ordination; it admits the Minister to the full rights and privileges that go with his status; in origin these were concerned with the discipline of stationing, the right to financial allowances, the possibility of attending Conference, and the like. Some might argue from the period when it was tantamount to ordination that this still conveys fully the authority of a Christian Minister, and that the Ordination Service simply invokes the divine blessing on that ministry; but now that the two ceremonies are separated, it is the Ordination which conveys authority for the office and work of a Christian Minister and Pastor ‘now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands’. Moreover, in this service, as well as conferring authority we pray that the

candidate may receive the Holy Spirit for this purpose; and we believe that God answers prayer.

22. It is sometimes argued that Reception into Full Connexion might better follow Ordination. This does sometimes happen, as when men are ordained at the Welsh Assembly; and historically there have been other instances which imply that the President has authority to ordain on behalf of the Conference, even without the customary resolution authorising the ordination. (This resolution, which was at one time part of the resolution receiving into Full Connexion, has in recent years been a separate resolution in the Ministerial Session of the Conference, to whose province ordination belongs: Deed of Union, clause 17). The order of these ceremonies is not in the last resort important. No doubt there are arguments either way, but it seems best to retain the present order as the norm. If one ceremony is separated from the other in time, it would seem to be right that the person concerned should refrain from acting in the way proper to the ceremony that has not yet taken place. Thus it is clear that a person who has been ordained but not yet received into Full Connexion cannot vote in the Ministerial Session of Synod; and it would seem proper that a person who has been received into Full Connexion but not yet ordained (as may happen overseas, or through illness) should not preside at the Lord's Supper, unless he otherwise has a dispensation to do so.

23. How then do we and should we secure within Methodism that ministry is exercised within the discipline and life of the Church? We should preserve the principle that no one is to be ordained unless he or she is going to exercise ministerial functions. We should not regard ordination as like the call to the Bar of a barrister who is qualified but never intends to practise. We should preserve the principle that for grave reasons the Conference may wholly deprive a Minister of his ministerial status or at least of the exercise of his functions. If such a person were reinstated into Full Connexion, he would not again be ordained. 'Ordination is never repeated in the Methodist Church' (M 16). But unless and until reinstatement occurs, he is not an ordained Minister for any practical purpose.

24. What then is to be done in the case of those who wish not to exercise their ministry in any regular way or to exercise it in some sphere which the Conference is not willing to recognize as a suitable sector? Hitherto many Ministers have resigned over issues of this kind, and their subsequent status has sometimes been in dispute, though the present intention of the Conference is clearly enough indicated by the phrase, if the Conference so decides, 'permitted to resume his status as a Local Preacher'. Years ago there was a status called 'without pastoral charge', but this is not now permitted. It would indeed seem strange if someone whose call to the ministry included a call to preach should cease to say 'Woe is me if I preach not the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:16). Local Preachers, indeed, normally preach till sickness or age prevents them. The call to preach is lifelong and this is no doubt part of the truth underlying the notion of indelibility. A preacher does not lay aside preaching as a barrister might cease practising at the Bar and go into industry. And, similarly, one would expect that one who had once received authority to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments would wish to preside from time to time at the Lord's Supper.

25. That does not, however, preclude the possibility that a Minister might wish to exercise a ministry on an 'auxiliary' basis while following some other occupation. The question whether he may legitimately do so turns largely on the question whether the ordained ministry is essentially a whole-time paid occupation. On this the Conference has said 'These 'presbyter-bishops' appointed by St Paul may well have continued to

work at their original occupations and may not have received any payment for their ministerial work; yet the principle of a ministry financially supported by the Church is already recognized in the New Testament. (1 Cor. 9, 3-14).’ (M 8). There are clear advantages in having the whole-time services of Ministers, and this should still be regarded as the norm. But ‘there is, in our judgment, no scriptural or theological reason which requires the ordained ministry to be full-time or to be paid or which precludes the appointment of “auxiliary” ministers’. (C 25). The reasons why we have not had such Ministers lie in the conception that being in Full Connexion involves being a Travelling Preacher, i.e. subject to the discipline of the Conference in stationing. In Wesley’s days a Preacher who was not free to travel was indisputably a Local Preacher. But the situation has changed since the Travelling Preachers became also ordained presbyters. There seems no theological reason why a person who is prevented from travelling because he is engaged in some other occupation should not be ordained as a presbyter. It may indeed be asked how this is compatible with Clause 30 of the Deed of Union, which says ‘Christ’s Ministers in the Church are Stewards in the household of God and Shepherds of his flock. Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation’. The Commission on the Church’s Ministries dealt with this question as follows:

‘Standing Order 48 (3), which is concerned with ‘permissions to serve external organisations’, provides that ‘permission shall be given to engage only in such service as is compatible with the calling of a Christian Minister’. Thus so long as the non-ministerial employment of an auxiliary is ‘compatible with the calling of a Christian Minister’, it seems clear, from this precedent, that the Conference does not regard such employment as infringing the Deed of Union. The experimental Standing Order 48 (3), which for a three year period replaces the form just quoted, requires the Committee for Ministry in the Sectors to give ‘particular attention to the rightness of the appointment for a full and proper exercise of the calling of a Christian Minister’ and therefore does not affect the point being made’. (C. 25).

If this line of interpretation is justifiable, it solves this difficulty. The Commission proceeded to argue the case for and against such Auxiliary Ministries, (C 24-29), and the Conference has referred the matter to the Division of Ministries for review in 1974 (Conference 1971 *Representative Agenda* pp. 471-6; *Daily Record* p. 58). We therefore merely reaffirm that there is no theological objection. It has sometimes been suggested that a term other than ‘Full Connexion’ should be used to describe such Ministers if we are to have them. But the term ‘Full Connexion’ distinguishes those so admitted from Probationers, and it seems best to retain it for all our ordained Ministers. It would be necessary to have a class of Ministers in Full Connexion whose privileges and obligations were differently defined, and this would involve alterations of the Standing Orders and possibly of the Deed of Union. The recent resolution that ‘Married women ministers in Full Connexion shall, if they so request, be exempt from normal stationing by the Conference’ (*Minutes* 1972 p.11) affords a precedent.

26. If such a class of Auxiliary Ministers were instituted, the question would naturally arise whether a ‘full-time’ Minister might ask permission to join it. Certainly, when he offered for the ministry, he put himself under the discipline of stationing. It could, however, be argued that it would be better for a Minister to be put in such a class than to resign; the Conference would have to devise an appropriate procedure for giving permission in such cases; such men would be ‘expected to give

such help to the Circuit as they were able', to quote the phrase used about married women exempt from stationing. Similarly there should be a procedure whereby an auxiliary Minister after further training could become a Minister subject to stationing in the normal way.

Sector Ministries

27. We now arrive at the question of the 'Sectors'. The word became current in Methodism through the reports of the Commission on the Church's Ministries: 'Most people nowadays are called upon to live in a number of different "worlds" which are largely independent of each other. To those worlds outside church, home and family, we give the name "sector".' (C 4). The Church's mission is not only to individuals in their homes and families, but also to the institutions and other organizations in which men spend a great part of their lives. Within these sectors there must be a Christian presence and a Christian mission. As the Father sent the Son into the world, so the Son sends all Christians, Ministers and lay people alike. Christ died for Church and world, and the Minister is sent into the world not into areas of community or culture entirely alien from God but to a place where God's reconciling love has already embraced all men in the totality of our human existence. It is obvious indeed that the Church must seek to fulfil this mission largely through lay people, who vastly outnumber Ministers, but for many years now some ordained Ministers have worked in the sectors, particularly in education. This practice arose, partly at any rate, through a shortage of lay people trained in religious education. Such Ministers are appointed and paid by secular bodies. But whereas formerly the Conference gave them 'permission to serve external organizations' as a kind of exceptional arrangement, a new system arose, partly because of the pressure brought by Ministers who could not obtain such permission, felt called to work in the sectors, and had to choose between such work and resignation; and partly because of new theological insights into the nature of mission in these 'sectors', as at this time they began to be called. Thus a sector is now regarded as a normal sphere in which a Minister may be authorized to exercise his ministry, even though the proportion who do so is comparatively small. Those who were formally given 'permission to serve an external organization' are now included among the ministers in the sectors, though the original 'permission to serve' was given by the Conference under different regulations from those which now operate in relation to the sectors. The questions that arise are whether in the light of our doctrine of ordination a sector is indeed a proper sphere for the exercise of an ordained ministry, and, if so, to quote the exact question put to us, what is 'the relation of the ordained ministry in the sector to that of the laity'.

28. The underlying theology of the employment of ordained Ministers in the sectors rests on two concepts which we have already expounded: one is based on the fact that the Minister has certain functions to fulfil, of which the administration of the sacraments is the most distinctive; the other insists that ministry is not just a collection of functions, but that ordained Ministers are representative persons. With one or other of these concepts as premise, many would argue as follows. First, the ordained Minister in the sectors fulfils as far as possible the same functions as his colleague in the neighbourhood ministry. Nevertheless 'he may be less conscious of his sacramental role, though the fullness of ministry by the Church requires that it should engage in worship as well as service, and an ordained Minister should play his part in developing this'. (Commission on the Church's Ministries, Conference 1970 *Representative Agenda* p. 649). One school of thought judges the propriety of a sector ministry almost entirely by the opportunities it affords for a sacramental ministry. A variant of this is to assimilate the concept of sector ministry to that of auxiliary

ministry; those who hold this view approve of a Minister's working in the sectors so long as on Sundays he preaches and administers the sacraments in a church; it is this function on Sundays which, in their view, justifies his position as an ordained Minister.

29. Second, some would not lay so much stress on the Minister's sacramental role or indeed on any of the particular functions of a Minister, but would rather stress his representative role. 'The role of an ordained Minister in the sector is not different from his role in the neighbourhood. He will be Christ's ambassador and the representative of the total ministries of Christ and of the whole people of God . . . The ordained Minister helps the Church in the sector to come to its own task more effectively . . . Through the authority given to him by the Church he represents the Church in a way no one else can. The Church relies on him to provide co-ordination within the whole body of Christians' (C 20). Those who hold this view see the ordained Minister as a missionary-apostle rather than as ministering to a settled congregation, and they see his specialized training as equipping him for his role. It is true that lay people are also called to represent the Church and to engage in mission in the sectors, and some of them may be trained in theology and pastoral skills; but Methodism strongly emphasizes the partnership of the ordained Ministers and the lay people. The Ministers 'hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people' (Deed of Union, clause 30), and thus where the Church is to be visible, it should be represented by Ministers and lay people together. But on this view the Minister in this setting, as in others has, and is known to have, a distinctive, focal role within the total ministry of the Church, and when this is recognized by these among whom, and those with whom, he works, the effectiveness of the Church's mission is increased. This recognition is ensured by the Church's action in testing and approving his wish to work in the sectors, and in stationing him accordingly.

30. A third argument arises from the need to experiment. Although there is a sense in which the Church rather than the Minister is chaplain to the wider community, yet there may be situations which demand that some pioneer, whether Minister or layman, should be very much 'on his own', to some extent cut off from the normal collegiate ministry of Ministers and laymen in partnership. All Christians are called to show initiative in new situations and circumstances, and the church needs to be generous and sensitive in recognizing the divine call of the pioneers.

31. Some, however, are not wholly convinced by these arguments. They usually distinguish between those whose work in the sectors requires that they be ordained ministers and 'those whose work in the sectors does not require ordination and who must determine for themselves by their attitude whether they exercise a ministry or not'. (Report of the Working Party appointed to review the first three years of work of the Committee on Ministry in the Sectors, Conference 1972 *Representative Agenda* p. 462). Whereas there is little dispute about the former category, some question the latter category. They gladly recognize that Christ sends all Christians on a mission to the world, and that special circumstances may call for pioneers; but in those cases where the ordained Minister exercises only a few of his distinctive functions, they ask what is his role, and they fear that the emphasis on his specially representative character may lead to a depreciation of the representative role of lay people.

32. The Committee was not able to resolve this difference of theological opinion, but has sought to clarify the issue by this statement. It recommends that the final resolution of the question, when the Church wishes to make it, should depend on a

serious discussion of the theological issue, and not on the virtues and faults, successes and failures of individual Sector Ministers.

33. We wish, however, to make a comment on the stationing of Sector Ministers. The Commission on the Church's Ministries has laid great stress on the idea 'that Methodism can only truly fulfil its mission to the present age if its ordained ministry, though operating in various patterns, acts under one discipline and one authority' (C 22). This means that 'he is at the disposal of the Church and accepts the ultimate authority of Conference' (C 22) and is assigned to a circuit and will wish to preach regularly. The point about preaching is undoubtedly sound; the point about being at the disposal of the Church has been interpreted by the concept of 'responsible stationing'. This recognizes that there are factors in the situation of a Sector Minister which mean that he cannot be recalled to a circuit or moved to another post in the same sector with the same facility as that with which a Circuit Minister can be moved. But this informal recognition is not embodied in our Standing Orders, and at the Conference of 1973 the Commission initiated a debate as to whether some further modification of the principle of availability for stationing is necessary (Conference 1973 *Representative Agenda* pp. 477-83). The Conference resolved: 'Subject to the outcome of the review of the Sector Ministries to be undertaken by the Division of Ministries and laid before Conference in 1975 the Conference directs that the Division shall examine further the principles embodied in this report and report to the Conference of 1975' (*Daily Record*, p. 34). We have already said (paragraph 25) that we do not consider availability for stationing to be essential to the concept of an ordained presbyter. The acceptance of this view would entail a considerable alteration in the discipline of the Ministers considered as Travelling Preachers, and the Conference would need to ponder it with care; it is not precluded by any theological consideration.

34. Before we leave the question of Sector Ministries and turn to the diaconate, we note that the question is sometimes raised whether the sector ministry is not diaconal rather than presbyteral, at least in those sectors where the administration of the sacraments is rarely required. We have tended to think of the diaconate as an 'inferior' branch of the ministry, no doubt because of its 'apprentice' aspect in some churches, but it should rather be regarded as a parallel ministry. Many who are serving in the sectors are already ordained presbyters, but it is at least arguable that when we consider selecting and training fresh people for sector ministry we should ordain them not as presbyters but as deacons.

Diaconate

35. The differentia of the diaconal ministry is less easy to define than that of the presbyterate. To render service is the duty of every Minister as of every Christian. In Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches deacons traditionally have certain liturgical functions, but at least in the Church of England they do not now have any function which cannot, at least in an emergency, be performed by a layman. But in that Church they legally belong to the clergy, whereas deaconesses do not. In Methodism we ordain deaconesses, but we do not have deacons, for we have said: 'The Reformation Office of "deacon", clearly corresponding to the New Testament "diaconos", is held among us by the various kinds of "stewards" who are called to perform their stewardship to the glory of God and the building up of the Church'. (M 12-13). Our deaconesses are not as such authorized to preach, though almost all of them do so as local preachers.

36. Is there today a continuing role for the diaconal ministry? In Churches of the 'Catholic' tradition men have been made deacons a year or so before being made presbyters; and deacons have thus administratively, though not theologically, corresponded to our probationers. This can be defended on the grounds that to become first a deacon is a way of emphasizing that the role of servant characterizes the whole Christian ministry and that they do not lay aside this role when they are ordained as presbyters. But generally speaking it has recently been felt unsatisfactory that the diaconate should thus be treated as a kind of apprenticeship (if indeed such an interval before ordination as presbyters is needed at all) or at least that it should virtually be confined to this role; and there have been occasional experiments in 'permanent' deacons. The matter was discussed in a Report of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission (*Towards Reconciliation* pp. 22-4), but despite this and a considerable volume of other literature on the subject, there is as yet no clear way forward.

37. The diaconate on one view might cover those who in Christ's name render particular services in the world: Christian probation officers, social service workers, teachers, and so on. But as all Christians are called to be servants, it is impossible to set bounds to such a list. Some would meet this difficulty by confining the diaconate to those who are paid by the Church. But if this body were initially restricted to those who are paid by and at the disposal of the Church and therefore closely under its discipline, e.g. deaconesses (usually), lay missionaries etc., it would soon find some of its members wishing to move (as indeed some deaconesses have already moved) into sectors, and thus it would develop a more elastic discipline; then some teachers, for example, might think that they could just as appropriately be deacons because years before they had served briefly in a school in an overseas mission. Nor would such a deacon have anything distinctive about him, as a Minister still has the distinctive authority to preside at the Lord's Supper. It might thus be better from the start to have no idea of liability to stationing, in which case local preachers, and class leaders could be included. But it might then be asked how the services of such lay people would be enriched or helped by the conferment of semi-clerical status.

38. One possible solution would be to abandon the idea of the diaconate as a form of ordained ministry with all the idea of permanence which that involves, and to institute a 'religious order'. There have been in the Church many religious orders, some of them predominantly lay, which have lived under a stricter discipline than Christians generally. There seems no reason why the vows taken by those entering such an order need be permanent. Men and women might enter such an order and place themselves entirely at the disposal of the Church, as, say, a lay missionary might do, and then later, if they wished, be perfectly free to seek other employment or live under a less strict discipline. There might indeed be two forms of this, both involving a strict devotional discipline, but only one involving the discipline of stationing.

39. The principle that has led to the acceptance of men and women alike into the presbyteral ministry requires that if we are to have a diaconal ministry in any form, men and women in the diaconate should have identical status (whether the women are to be called deacons or deaconesses).

40. The Conference handled this matter as recently as 1971, when the Report of the Commission on the Church's Ministries included a report from a working-party from the Commission and the Wesley Deaconess Order on the Place of the Wesley Deaconess Order in the Methodist Church today. (Conference 1971 *Representative Agenda* pp. 477-82). The Conference in adopting the Report, assured the members of the Wesley Deaconess Order that they have the confidence and support of the Church,

and recorded its conviction that there is a continuing need in the Church for a diaconal ministry alongside the ordained ministry of the Word and Sacrament. It also referred several recommendations to the committee of the Wesley Deaconess Order and the General Committee of the Division of Ministries for further study. (*Daily Record*, 1971, p. 58). We wish to add the possibility that any extension of such a diaconate might perhaps involve its being considered as a religious order rather than a form of the ordained ministry. Regard must, however, be had to the fact that the present members of the Wesley Deaconess Order have been ordained to it. But the problems which we have mentioned are not easily solved, particularly when the Church has not yet made up its mind about auxiliary Ministers and about the discipline of Sector Ministries. We therefore hope that the Division of Ministries will consider these problems together, and that in the meantime the Wesley Deaconess Order will continue. We do not regard it as the task of our committee to work out detailed plans for new forms of ministry, but only to give our opinion on the theological principles involved; but we are of course at the disposal of the Conference and of the Division of Ministries for further consultation.

(*Agenda* 1974, pp. 253-67)